

D. A. Carson. "Brief Appreciation of the Life and Service of Leon Morris." July 31, 2006.  
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## **BRIEF APPRECIATION OF THE LIFE AND SERVICE OF LEON MORRIS**

Born in 1914, Leon Morris went home to be with the Lord on Monday 25 July 2006. His years of service were remarkably diverse: he was an effective pastor in the Australian outback (those years are memorably described in his 1995 autobiography, *Bush Parson*), he served churches in Melbourne and Sydney, became Warden of Tyndale House in Britain, and for twenty-nine years taught at Ridley College, Melbourne, from which he retired as principal in 1979. Behind the scenes he quietly supported a number of strategic causes, not least the Bush Church Aid Society. He and his wife Mildred, who preceded him to glory in 2003 after sixty-two years of marriage, were welcome guests in the UK and the United States, where Dr Morris's carefully prepared lectures, full of content, reverence, dry wit, and probing intelligence, endeared him alike to many faculties and their students.

Those of us who knew him well have our stock of Leon stories. Some years after writing his magisterial commentary on the Gospel of John, Dr Morris was lecturing on that Gospel at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. One student accosted him after class, showed him a difficult passage in the Greek text, and asked the guest lecturer what it meant. Dr Morris looked at the passage for a few moments, and then said, "Without giving it more attention, I'd be inclined to say that it means such-and-such." The student, more than a little impudent, responded, "Then why in your commentary did you argue that it means something else?" But the remarkable fact in this account is that it was Leon himself who told me of the encounter. He thought it was hugely amusing—a measure, no doubt, of his utter lack of pretension.

Dr Morris wrote more than fifty books, pitched at an array of levels. Three were on the cross, one of which, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, should to this day be on any preacher's list of "must" books. But apart from a knack for writing workmanlike commentaries on New Testament books (he managed to slip in one Old Testament commentary, too!), on several occasions Dr Morris demonstrated a knack for addressing a fad that he thought was unhelpful. For instance, at a time when a small but growing number of scholars were arguing that the structure and substance of the canonical Gospels could largely be explained by showing how

they allegedly aligned with lectionaries used in the synagogues, Dr Morris published a little book with the title *The New Testament and the Jewish Lectionaries*—never one of his best sellers, of course, but a useful piece that helped a generation of students sort through one of the muddles of the day. When Ernst Käsemann was making apocalyptic the “mother of Christian theology,” Leon’s little book on *Apocalyptic* again helped students find their way through the morass of competing views. His book on the cross, to which I have already made reference, helped restore confidence in a carefully articulated grasp of penal substitution, in an accurate understanding of propitiation.

Leon and Mildred had no children, but were parents to many. His more extended family and many friends recall the man even more powerfully than his scholarship: we cannot think of him without a smile, recalling the godly humility combined with puckish humor. Confident that Christians never say their last goodbye, already we look forward to renewing ties with him.

D. A. Carson

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